

## **Community Legal Bridge (CLB) at a Crossroads**

Case Overview: Community Legal Bridge (CLB) is a multi-service legal services nonprofit with the mission of providing *pro per* assistance to low-income immigrant and worker communities in the areas of tenants' rights and workers' rights in Central California (old theory of change). Before Covid-19, they were a small organization, well-known throughout the region as experts in tenants' and workers' rights. The organization succeeded in shifting away from *pro per* services to full-scope representation approximately one year before Covid-19. After a strategic planning retreat, the organization decided to shift its efforts away from providing limited assistance to as many people as possible to providing full-scope representation - as part of its new theory of change. As a result of Covid-19 and the increased funding that came along with it, they were able to expand and are now a mid-sized organization. Today, the organization is facing serious financial challenges and internal disagreements about how to move forward.

Significant funding losses (35% in workers' rights and 20% in housing law), combined with political shifts threatening city funding (25% of the budget), have forced CLB to consider changes to its service model. Internal conflict has emerged among staff, executive leadership, the Board, and funders over which programmatic and strategic direction CLB should pursue. Thankfully, the organization has enough reserves to cover the loss of funding over the next 12 months. If CLB were to utilize their reserves to backfill the lost funding for 12 months, it would leave CLB without any reserves and only one month of operating costs.

### **CLB Core Values**

- Justice
- Empowerment
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Inclusion

## **Emerging Proposals:**

- Executive Director (Noah): Believes staff reduction is necessary – through attrition and/or layoffs. Noah also sees this as an opportunity to embrace technology (more specifically AI) and use it as a means of streamlining intake and casework to minimize the reduction in client services. For example, Noah is aware of platforms that help with intake and discovery. Noah also believes it's time CLB had a brief bank, so people aren't starting from scratch each time.
- Staff: Advocate for maintaining current staffing and programming for 12 months using reserves while pursuing new funding opportunities. Some advocate for adding immigration legal services.
- Board: Support a pro per model with targeted strategic litigation to reduce costs while preserving legal impact. Express concern about using large portions of reserves and potential mission drift with immigration work.
- Funders: Transition to a holistic model that integrates legal, social, and mental health services to support fewer clients more comprehensively.

## **Senior Leadership Dynamics:**

Noah is a very outgoing ED who gets excited when talking about ways to change the organization's policies and procedures to increase efficiency both at the programmatic and operational levels. They love thinking about what is possible.

Prior to joining CLB, Noah worked as an immigration attorney. Their Senior Leadership team consists of four directors: Marlowe, the Director of the Tenants' Rights Program; Rory, the Director of the Workers' Rights Program; Sage, the Development Director; and Koda, the Director of Operations.

Unfortunately, they don't all get along. There is tension between the program directors and the admin directors. The program directors don't fully understand what the admin directors do, and the admin directors feel undervalued by the program directors. Moreover, the program directors feel as though the admin directors are too focused on mitigating risks whereas the program directors are committed to CLB's mission. The program directors feel like the admin directors too often forget why CLB does what it does.

**Staff Morale:**

Staff morale is currently low. CLB has already gone through a lot of changes. Many of the staff are still adjusting to the organizational growing-pains resulting from the Covid-19 expansion. Moreover, one of CLB's beloved attorneys is very resistant to change. It was very hard for them when CLB transitioned from one theory of change to another. What is more, there is an increasing demand for CLB's services, which Noah and the program directors believe will only get worse. Furthermore, the current political and social climate has been weighing on the staff. Finally, staff are experiencing burnout from work from home. There are blurred boundaries between work and home.

**Technology Gaps:**

Staff have inconsistent access to laptops, secure internet, and client communication tools. Cybersecurity protocols are weak, and (during Covid-19) Zoom became the default—often without proper client confidentiality measures in place. Half of the staff believe CBI is underutilizing technology to the detriment of CBI's clients and prospective clients. Staff are inconsistent with how they use CBI's case management system.